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ABSTRACT

This study examined employers' attitudes to recruiting Classics graduates with the primary aim of determining employers' criteria when recruiting graduates and of assessing how far Classics graduates matched these criteria. Sixteen employers of Classics graduates from a cross-section of blue-chip organizations in industry, commerce and the public sector were interviewed to describe the qualities they looked for in recruiting Classics graduates. Five specially selected classicists and career advisers were also included to provide further perspectives on the problem area. Findings of the study revealed the following: (1) employers were interested in recruiting graduates from any discipline provided candidates were "bright people" who possessed good oral and written communication, interpersonal and managerial skills, numeracy skills and commercial flair; (2) personality factors employers required of Classics graduates were drive, determination, tenacity, commitment, energy, adaptability, creativity and common sense; (3) several employers expressed the view that Classics graduates would be particularly good in service industries, especially the computer industry. It was concluded that, although there is competiton from the more vocationally-oriented graduates, Classics graduates can hold their own in the knowledge that their discipline develops many qualities which employers are looking for, and a breadth of view which few other disciplines can provide. (LPT)

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The Council of University Classical Departments (CUCD), which commissioned this Survey, was founded in 1969 to promote the study and teaching of Classics and related subjects in Universities.

The CUCD is grateful to Christopher Arnander, Philip Chappell, Anthony Cleaver, Rodney Leach, Sir Jeremy Morse, Sir Robert Wade-Gery and the Council for Industry and Higher Education for making this research project possible.

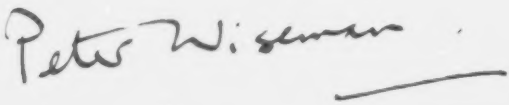
FOREWORD

Last year, the conference of the CUCD included a session on 'Classics in the Market Place'. The businessmen who contributed all agreed that the subject has a lot going for it, but needs to advertise itself more effectively: "show what you're offering, and why it's of value to employers". One of the CUCD's guests on that occasion was Patrick Coldstream, Director of the Council for Industry and Higher Education, and through his good offices funds were found for the research into employers' attitudes and requirements which is reported in this booklet.

We all have our own anecdotal evidence for the employability of Classicists; now at last there is something more substantial, an objective survey professionally undertaken by impartial researchers with no axe to grind and no preconceptions about what the results might be. This report is their work, in their words (and those of their respondents).

The results speak for themselves. Forget 'irrelevance' — the rigorous study of the languages, literature and society of the ancient world conspicuously provides those 'transferable skills' which employers need and value. Classical graduates are in demand, and for good reason. Pupils, parents and curriculum designers, please take note . . . .

All Classicists will wish to join the CUCD in thanking Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, whose initiative got this whole project started; the well-wishers who generously found the money for it; and above all Ann Hughes Hallett who did the work.



May 1990

T.P. Wiseman
(Chairman, CUCD)

Classics in the Market Place

An independent research study on attitudes to the employment of Classics graduates

INTRODUCTION

What is the 'relevance' of Classics? What contribution should the discipline make to our schools and universities into the next century? At the heart of the issue is the question of how Classics can help the needs of today's employers. The Council of University Classical Departments decided to find out the answer, and commissioned an independent research study to investigate the present climate of opinion on Classics and its value as a preparation for employment.

THE RESEARCHERS

The study was undertaken by external researchers on behalf of the Council of University Classical Departments. Ann Hughes Hallett (M.A. History), a researcher of long and varied experience, was in charge of the study. For some years she was a Director of a major international research agency and now works as an independent consultant specialising in personnel and graduate recruitment studies. She was assisted by James Lapsley (also a History graduate) who has worked with her on a number of personnel research projects.

APPROACH

The project was based on *qualitative research methods* whereby carefully selected small samples are used but each respondent is interviewed in depth. In this instance, the sample consisted of a cross-section of blue-chip organisations in industry, commerce and the public sector. The results, therefore, reflect the views of the top echelon of employers. In addition to interviews with major employers of graduates, some specially selected Classicists and Careers Advisers were included to provide further perspectives to the problem area.

THE SAMPLE

Industrial/Commercial Organisations 5

2 large international consumer goods companies
1 international oil company
1 international computer company
1 international automotive company

Service Industries 4

1 international advertising agency
1 computer service company
1 management consultancy/recruitment agency
1 graduate recruitment agency

Banking/Accountancy 3

2 major banks
1 major international accountancy firm

Media/Publishing 2

1 national newspaper
1 international publishing company

Public Sector 2

2 major departments of the Civil Service

Special Interviews 5

3 Classicists (2 businessmen, 1 educationalist)
2 Careers Advisers

Total: 21

THE INTERVIEWS

Within each employer organisation, the relevant respondent was identified, i.e. the person responsible for graduate recruitment. In-depth interviews were then carried out. This method allowed full scope to respondents to express their opinions freely and frankly in an informal and relatively unstructured situation. The researchers worked to a brief, but the nature of the interview enabled respondents to expand on themes and issues which were important to them.

Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were tape-recorded. To ensure spontaneity of views and to avoid bias, participants were not told of the specific topic and the project was presented to them as a study on graduate recruitment. Only after opinions on graduate recruitment and attitudes to different disciplines were established was the subject of Classics introduced.

In accordance with professional research practice, respondents were guaranteed anonymity and assured that their names and organisations would remain confidential to the researchers. Hence, in the findings reported here, the organisations and individuals involved have been described in very general terms.

THE FINDINGS

In this summary of the findings, the ordering of topic areas does *not* follow the sequence of the interviews.

I WHAT CLASSICS HAS TO OFFER

Without exception, Classics was held in high esteem by all taking part in this survey. The phrase most often used was 'intellectual rigour'. Classics was seen as a very good training, a strong discipline with a high level of academic achievement and a discipline which engenders breadth of view, accuracy, analytical abilities and communication skills.

Some examples of respondents' views illustrate the general climate of opinion:

> *"Classics does not narrow down your potentialities early as almost any other degree does."*
> (Classicist and publisher)

> *"The strength of Classics is that you are doing something intellectually rigorous . . . . it has a logical approach, like Maths."*
> (Industry)

> *"Classics produces highly-trained minds and a logical approach."*
> (Accountancy firm)

> *"Classics produces an ordered mind, an ability to present cases precisely and concisely."*
> (Automotive industry)

> *"I think Classics graduates are probably better than any other discipline . . . . they think the pants off issues."*
> (Advertising agency)

> *"Classics is a very good training indeed. Apart from all other things it teaches you to write clearly, whereas in many other disciplines the use of language is clumsy and unclear."*
> (Classicist and educationalist)

> *"The study of Classics produces well-constructed minds."*
> (Civil servant)

> *"The study of Classics makes you analytical, gives you breadth in viewing situations . . . . logical reasoning and numeracy go with this. Clear thinking, the ability to order material, to adapt to different situations, all these things . . . . and* that *is what employers are looking for."*
> (Careers Adviser)

In short, Classics was seen to offer:

- intellectual rigour
- breadth of view
- logical and analytical skills
- an ability with language
- clarity of expression
- skills of persuasion
- skill in handling, structuring and presenting information
- a sense of balance
- a broad foundation training

II EMPLOYERS' CRITERIA

The most important theme in this study was the investigation of employers' criteria when recruiting graduates, in order to assess how far Classicists matched these criteria. Employers were asked to describe the qualities they looked for in recruiting graduates. (This information was established spontaneously before any mention of Classics was made.)

Which Discipline?

Employers were primarily interested in finding 'bright people'. They were happy to recruit from *any* discipline, provided candidates possessed the other qualities they required. (These qualities are described later in this section.) There were, of course, cases where employers needed scientists, engineers or computer specialists for the operation of their business, but for the general recruitment of graduates they drew from *all* disciplines.

> *"We have no favourite discipline but we like a good mixture of disciplines."*
> (Accountancy firm)

> *"We are looking for skills, not subject matter. We have taken all sorts of unlikely graduates — e.g. in Music, Theology — we wouldn't refuse any discipline."*
> (Bank)

> *"If personal qualities are right, discipline does not matter."*
> (Computer service company)

> *"We are concerned about whether their minds are properly trained and we have no subject requirement."*
> (Civil servant)

A small number of employers expressed leanings towards Economics, Computer Science and Business Studies, but nevertheless insisted that they were open-minded on discipline.

Classics?

The general climate was favourable to Classics. Some employers said they would welcome more applications from Classicists, but felt that it might not occur to such graduates to apply to *their* company (e.g. computing company, consumer goods company, accountancy firm, automotive industry).

> *"We have no barriers to Classicists."*
>
> (Advertising agency)

> *"Some non-technical Arts graduates are taking to Information Technology much better than some Maths graduates."*
>
> (Oil company)

> *"One discipline I would single out would be Classics. Classicists we have had from the past and the very few we get now are usually very good and sometimes quite outstanding. Classics seems to train minds that can be used here."*
>
> (Bank)

> *"Employers regard Classics as a hard, respectable subject."*
>
> (Careers Adviser)

'Bright People'

'Brightness' was described in various ways:

- the ability to absorb a vast amount of data and recognise the most relevant points to the task in hand
- the ability to deal with very complex subject matter
- the ability to see the broad picture as well as the detail
- the ability to go into new areas and still win the argument
- the ability to analyse and synthesise
- logical thinking and reasoning
- able achievers
- having intellectual rigour in their thought processes

Classicists were rated highly on all these attributes.

> BUT
>
> *"We are a people business, so we don't want boffins who just stick to their paper work."*
>
> (Bank)

> *"We don't want very 'head down' studious types who only do well in exams."*
>
> (Service company)

Communication Skills

All respondents emphasised communication skills (verbal and written) as being vital to success in their organisations. The ability to 'get the message across', to handle meetings, to put over a case, to persuade an audience and to be able to explain a situation clearly were all considered highly important, as well as the facility to write concisely and correctly.

> *"We need extremely good communicators."*
> (Industry)
>
> *"We must have people who can communicate with clients."*
> (Computer service company)
>
> *"You must be able to write correctly, otherwise you are not taken seriously."*
> (Industry)
>
> *"Business needs people who are literate."*
> (Industry)
>
> *"Most graduates can write but at great length; few can write to a purpose."*
> (Bank)

Interpersonal Skills

The importance of interpersonal skills must not be underestimated — all employers agreed on this and described what they looked for:

- good self-presentation
- ability to get on with people
- capable of back room work *and* good client relations
- teamwork and leadership
- people who are happy working in groups
- enthusiastic, outgoing personalities
- presence without dominance
- self-reliance

> *"We need people to lead the team and mobilise the inherent knowledge of the group."*
> (Industry)
>
> *"In business it is necessary to cope with the task and the team."*
> (Industry)

Personality Factors

Drive, determination, tenacity, commitment, energy, adaptability, creativity and common sense were the major factors mentioned.

> *"Energy and drive — it's no good having all the other qualities if you don't have these."* (Industry)
>
> *"They must have commitment to our work."* (Accountancy firm)
>
> *"They need to be committed to the public sector."* (Civil servant)
>
> *"Although we look for many personality factors, they must be interested in finance."* (Bank)

Numeracy

The emphasis on numeracy depended very much on the type of employer; some saw it as essential, others useful. Many applied numeracy tests of one kind or another, usually tests of logic, reasoning and problem-solving. When asked, employers did not think Classicists would have a problem in this area, and most thought Classics graduates would be better than other Arts graduates because of their rigorous training.

Management Skills

Some employers mentioned management skills, but admitted that it was difficult to assess these in a new recruit.

> *"They must be good managers — financial and human."* (Civil servant)
>
> *"Managerial skills — a sense of scale and confidence in judgment."* (Civil servant)
>
> *"People who are generally good tend to develop into good managers."* (Service industry)
>
> *"We need good managers as well as good bankers."* (Bank)

Commercial Flair

This was metioned by some and was probably implicit for all in the business world.

> *"We want enterprising people . . ."* (Industry)
>
> *"Commercial 'nous' is important."* (Service industry)
>
> *"We are looking for budding entrepreneurs with commercial flair."* (Oil company)

III TYPES OF WORK SUITABLE FOR CLASSICISTS

When asked specifically whether they thought particular types of work were suitable (or unsuitable) for Classics graduates, some respondents said it was an artificial question to categorise in this way.

> *"Classicists come in all shapes and sizes — you can't categorise."* (Classicist and educationalist)
>
> *"Classicists can do anything."* (Careers Adviser)
>
> *"Any business where you have to communicate."* (Classicist and businessman)
>
> *"The degree doesn't matter — it's what sort of person you are."* (Automotive industry)

Service Industries

Several employers thought that Classics graduates would be particularly good in service industries, especially the computer industry.

> *"Classicists will do well in service industries because their training is to do with second-guessing the other person - even if that person lived 2000 years ago."* (Classicist and businessman)
>
> *"Computers — the ability to work in an alien language which computers do."* (Civil servant)

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May 1990

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"Information Technology — they would be good at that."
(Several respondents).

Banking

"They are very good at writing reports and there is a great deal of that in banks."
(Bank)

"Provided they can pick up sufficient economics, they can be used in any field in the bank."
(Bank)

Civil Service

It is often said that the Civil Service recruits a high proportion of Classics graduates, and some of our respondents thought that this was the case. However, on checking with the Civil Service this proved to be a thing of the past. Nowadays the Civil Service has no subject requirment, but Classics graduates are as welcome as any.

"There used to be a strong connection but the latest figures do not bear this out . . . although the Civil Service tests, which are based on logic and analysis, are good for Classicists."
(Careers Adviser)

Management

"More Classicists find their way into management than, say, scientists . . . Classicists probably take to management because they don't have particular technical skills and they have an interest in people and the problems people present."
(Civil servant)

Vocational Jobs

"In certain jobs they can follow their vocation — teaching, museums, publishing, libraries."
(Careers Adviser)

The Careers Advisers thought that Classics graduates could do anything in the "any discipline" market — in industry, finance, the public sector, the media — they have a wide choice.

IV THE VALUE OF CLASSICS

Many comments were made by respondents on the value of Classics as a foundation for the understanding of our civilisation **and** as a preparation for employment.

General

"It's all important stuff — it lies at the roots of civilisation . . . there is a terrible gap in the study of English because of the lack of knowledge of the classical myths . . ."

(Bank)

"Greece and Rome . . . a wonderful way to learn about politics . . . and the origins of our civilisation."

(Bank)

"It is Latin and Greek that are the roots of our language and culture; without them you are like a man blindfold, living in Western Europe."

(Classicist and publisher)

"Latin and Greek open doors to all sorts of Western languages."

(Industry)

"My 'Greats' course was the most difficult thing I have ever done . . . so it gave me confidence . . . and it is intellectually very taxing."

(Classicist and businessman)

"When you are young, to learn the accurate use of words through a language that is not being blurred by everyday use must be of value."

(Bank)

Preparation for Employment

"When I think of the enormous difficulty of writing Greek prose . . . it's a wonderful training for getting things down on paper clearly and concisely."
(Classicist and businessman)

"An excellent foundation for a wide range of things although not a precise training for any of them."
(Classicist and businessman)

"A Classics degree is almost as broad as you can go — certainly broader than English or a Modern Language — Industry would welcome Classicists."
(Classicist and publisher)

"Oxbridge Classicists are fought over by management consultants, accountancy firms, stockbrokers and ourselves."
(Industry)

"In business it is the training of transferable skills . . . in that, the Classics could be really strong."
(Bank)

"A numerate Classicist has no problems at all because he has mastered the structure of language as well as some of the things close to Science — especially if he has A level Maths."
(Industry)

And one respondent quoted Harold Macmillan's advice:

"Nothing you learn here (Classics at Oxford) will be of any use to you in your future life except that you will be able to tell if someone is talking rot."

V THE FUTURE

A number of respondents felt it was worth resisting the modern tendency to move away from traditional disciplines to more vocational subjects, and that Classics deserved to be revitalised.

> *"The picture has changed from the days when the accent was on turning out fine minds who could apply themselves to anything, to present-day industry's demand for a tightly-focussed group of skills. That, in my opinion, is dangerous if it goes too far - turning out people to a specification and to do a certain task. I don't like the idea of a person being educated not for his own benefit but to do a specific job. What happens when the need for those specific skills changes?"*
>
> (Management consultant)

> *"Revitalisation? I believe this profoundly: the situation is serious. It is nonsense to say that they are unfitted for a thrusting market economy."*
>
> (Classicist and publisher)

> *"Yes, it would be sad if Classics disappeared . . . and there is a need for a different perspective than vocational training gives."*
>
> (Oil company)

> *"I think it would be very sad . . . we need as a country a lot more vocational courses but to achieve this at the expense of purely academic subjects would be a shame . . . there are many organisations like us who want great variety in their intake."*
>
> (Accountancy firm)

> *"There is a trend towards turning out people who are approximately fitted for the roles we envisage for them — 'fitted' in our definition of the word rather than the educationalist's . . . Sponsored degrees all over the place, some pretty well designed by industry. All this pulls people away from Classics and the like."*
>
> (Management consultant)

Several respondents thought it important to persuade schools, employers and Government that Classics has a lot to offer. Suggestions were also made for combined courses, and for starting Classics in the sixth form or at university.

(CUCD note. Practically all university Classics departments already offer degree courses in which students take Latin and/or Greek from scratch; and a wide variety of combined-honours degrees is already available.)

VI WHAT DID CLASSICS GRADUATES DO?

Recent statistics show that in 1987-88 Classical Studies (including Latin, Greek, Classics, Classical Studies in translation, Classical Civilisation, Roman Studies, Ancient World-Classics, 7 disciplines in all) accounted for 0.7% of the total output of all first degree graduates.

(CUCD note. This is a substantial underestimate, since 'Greats' (the Oxford Lit. Hum. degree), which includes philosophy, is categorised in the Universities' Statistical Record as a "multi-disciplinary study", and therefore — absurdly enough — is not included in the statistics on Classical Studies.)

In terms of "known destinations", 50% went into employment, 25% went on to further education and training and a further 10% undertook miscellaneous activities (eg travelled abroad, unavailable for employment for various reasons etc).

39% of the total output of first degree graduates went into permanent UK employment. The most popular choices were "Other" Commerce/Services (30%), Accountancy (18%), Banking/Insurance/Finance (13%) and Public Service (13%). The picture varied by male and female graduates as shown in the following table extract:

WHERE DID THEY GO?

First Destinations of Classical Studies Graduates — By Type of Employment

	Total entering permanent UK employment %	*Men %*	*Women %*
Total — Industry/commerce	71	67	74
"Other" Commerce/Services	30	18	39
Accountancy	18	25	13
Banking/Insurance/Finance	13	14	12
Others	10	10	10
Public Service	13	18	9
Education	5	4	6
Miscellaneous	11	11	11

Source: Universities' Statistical Record on First Destinations 1987-88

WHAT DID THEY DO?

A further analysis by *type of work* showed that financial work was the most popular (29%), followed by buying/marketing/selling (17%) and administration/operational management (14%).

First Destinations of Classical Studies Graduates — by Type of Work

	Total entering permanent UK employment %	*Men* %	*Women* %
Financial Work	29	40	20
Buying/Marketing/Selling	17	14	20
Administration/Operational Management	14	8	19
Creative/Entertainment	10	8	11
Personnel/Social Services	7	7	7
Management Services	5	7	4
Information/Library Work	5	1	9
Teaching/Lecturing	2	2	2
Others	11	13	8

Source: Universities' Statistical Record

CONCLUSION

There are no barriers to the employment of Classicists provided such graduates have the other qualities sought by employers. Although there is competition from the more vocationally-oriented graduates, Classics graduates can hold their own in the knowledge that their discipline develops many of the qualities which employers are looking for - intellectual rigour, communication skills, analytical skills, the ability to handle complex information and, above all, a breadth of view which few other disciplines can provide.

Copies of this booklet may be obtained for £1.50 (payable to Council of University Classical Departments) and an A5 stamped addressed envelope for 15p, from the Secretary of CUCD:

Bernard Gredley
Department of Classics
King's College London
Strand, London WC2R 2LS

John Wilkins
Department of Classics
University of Exeter
EXETER EX4 4QH

or from the Spokesman for the Co-ordinating Committee for Classics:

Dr Peter Jones
Department of Classics
The University
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU

Please remember to enclose a cheque and an A5 SAE.

Copies can also be obtained from CSU (price £1.50 + 15p postage) at Crawford House, Precinct Centre, Manchester M13 9EP.

The Co-ordinating Committee for Classics (CCC) was founded in 1988 and consists of representatives from the British Academy and the six major Classical societies in the UK. It seeks to raise public awareness of issues which affect the teaching of Classics; to co-ordinate response to government educational initiatives; and to press publicly for the continued place of the Classics in education at all levels, from primary schools to Adult Education.

Its Spokesman, Dr Peter Jones, can be contacted at the address above, or on (phone) 091-221 0382, (fax) 091-221 0345.

Classical societies represented on the CCC are: Association for the Reform of Latin Teaching (ARLT), Classical Association (CA), Council of University Classical Departments (CUCD), Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies (Hellenic Society), Joint Association of Classical Teachers (JACT), and Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (Roman Society).

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